



# INDUSTRY CIRCULAR

DEPARTMENT OF  
THE TREASURY

Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms  
Washington, D. C. 20226

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## METHANOL CONTAMINATION IN ITALIAN WINES

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TO: WHOLESALERS AND IMPORTERS OF WINE AND OTHERS CONCERNED:

This circular will provide the importers/wholesalers of Italian wines with the current procedures to follow for the testing and documentation of methanol in Italian wines which are currently in their inventories and those of their retail customers, in customs bonded warehouses (CBW) awaiting release, or in transit from Italy.

On April 17, 1986, Officials of the Bureau met with officials of the Italian government to discuss the current U.S. restrictions on the importation and sale of Italian wines. During the course of this meeting, ATF was given documented assurances by the Italian Government that no Italian wines bottled or shipped prior to December 12, 1985 had been contaminated by the addition of methanol by Italian producers or bottlers.

Based on these assurances, the following procedures have been initiated by ATF:

1. For Italian wines for which there is documentary evidence that they were bottled or shipped to the United States prior to December 12, 1985, ATF will leave the testing for methanol content of these wines up to the discretion of the individual wholesaler, importer, distributor and retailer. ATF will not require mandatory testing of these wines.
2. For Italian wines bottled or shipped on or after December 12, 1985, all importers and wholesalers are advised that they should not sell these wines until they have had each brand of wine and vintage, if applicable, in their inventories tested by a commercial laboratory and certified as having safe levels of methanol. In addition to individual wholesaler testing, it will also be acceptable, if laboratory analyses are provided to the importer/wholesaler by his foreign supplier. These

laboratory analyses must also cover specific brands of wines, and the testing must have been performed by an Italian laboratory certified by the Italian Ministry of Agriculture. In both cases, copies of all laboratory analyses must be forwarded by the importer/wholesaler to ATF in Washington, DC per the instructions in Industry Circular #86-9.

3. For Italian wines bottled or shipped on or after December 12, 1985, which are currently being held in a CBW pending testing for methanol content, Customs has agreed to allow for the taking of samples by the importer for testing in commercial laboratories. These wines will be released by Customs upon presentation to Customs of a laboratory analysis showing safe levels of methanol for each brand in the shipment.

4. For those Italian wines bottled and shipped to the U.S. on or after December 12, 1985 but shipped before April 3, 1986, currently in transit from Italy and which do not have a laboratory certificate, the importer of record can effectuate release of these wines from Customs custody by signing a "Conditional Release Certification". By signing this certificate the importer of record will agree to secure samples of each brand and type of Italian wine from the shipment and send these samples to the ATF National Laboratory for testing. All samples should be mailed to 1401 Research Boulevard Rockville, Maryland 20850. Upon notification by Customs that the level of methanol was found safe, the shipment may be released to the retail level.

5. For Italian wines exported to the U.S. on or after April 3, 1986, a certificate of analysis will be required by Customs before the shipment will be released. This certificate must cover every brand and type of wine in the shipment and be issued by an Italian testing laboratory certified by the Italian Ministry of Agriculture. Any shipment received by Customs which was shipped to the U.S. on or after April 3, 1986 containing Italian wines which is not accompanied by this certificate will be denied entry.

Inquiries: All inquiries concerning the content of this circular should be directed to ATF's Alcohol Import-Export Branch in Washington DC at (202) 535-6245.

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Director